The Middlebury Campus

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BSU and Black Studies program celebrate Black culture through Black History Month and beyond

By MET LY
News Editor

On Monday, Feb. 16, students gathered in Coltrane Lounge for a Double Dutch workshop organized by the Black Students' Union (BSU) in conjunction with Evolution Dance Troupe, part of a host of events planned for Black History Month.

"Black History Month is a great opportunity to showcase Black culture in a positive light," BSU Co-President Michael Sanjurjo Jr. '28 said in an interview with the Campus.

Programming lined up for the month on top of the Double Dutch Workshop includes a Blaxploitation film series, multiple Welcome Back events, Spirit Week Celebration with various events and themes through the week, a student and faculty mixer, dining hall takeovers, a "Shades of Nudes" brunch and a collaboration with the student-run M Gallery.

"[What] we try to focus on is having something fun, something educational, and something that brings people together and promotes discourse," BSU Co-President Nawale Nachula '28 said.

Another common motivation from organizers behind the programming is building a sense of community, especially for Black students and faculty members. According to the 2024-2025 Common Data Set, African Americans make up only 5% of Middlebury's student cohort.

"I like to say [the Black community at Middlebury] is small but mighty," Nachula commented. "Creating a community between Black students and Black faculty and staff members [...] gives you a nice home away from home feeling."

Both BSU and the Black Studies Program have looked to collaborate with other clubs and departments on and off campus for events.

"At a small liberal arts college, there shouldn't be a reason why departments can't work together," Black Studies Program director Jerry Philogene explained. The program's Blaxploitation film series is in collaboration with faculty from both the Film and Media Culture and the Luso-Hispanic Studies departments.

"It's a good way for us to have interdisciplinary dialogue and cross-cultural conversations," she said.

"With all the things these other clubs do, they tie very well into our philosophy as BSU, which is to promote Black culture throughout different experiences at Middlebury," Nachula said. "A lot of our members are in these clubs, and we want to support

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CIA CAREER TALK AT ROHATYN CENTER DRAWS PROTEST

By SAM LUEKE
Staff Writer

On Jan. 20, the Rohatyn Center for Global Affairs and Center for Careers and Internships (CCI) hosted an Alumni Career Conversation featuring Philip Consentino '00, a retired agent in the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The event took place at the Robert A. Jones '59 Conference Room and was advertised as "not an official recruiting event," but as an opportunity for students to speak with college alumni about careers in the federal government, national intelligence and life in Washington, D.C.

Several students protested the talk, gathering outside the space to distribute material critiziting the agency's record of foreign intervention and detailing decades of anti-CIA activism at the college, and disrupting the talk.

Consentino also spent the month of J-Term teaching a Political Science course titled Intelligence Analysis and National Security Decisionmaking. In the course, students followed a fictionalized global conflict that escalated over four weeks, culminating in mock national security briefings.

Theo Maniatis '28.5, was a student of Mr. Consentino's class and attended the talk.

"We walked up and there were two students who greeted us," Maniatis said in an interview with The Campus. "One of them handed us a packet labeled 'The CIA is a terrorist organization.' Philip was at the head of the room, and he said at the beginning that we weren't there to talk about the organization, but about lessons from his career. Maybe halfway into the opening remarks, there was some question about the CIA. Philip deflected all of these."

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First Year Foundations: Lillian Tracy '29 Wins Oratory Now's Spencer Prize Speech Competition

COURTESY PHOTO / BRETT SIMISON
2026 fianlists, alongside emcee's Sarina Chitakara '25.5 (left), and Reed Hyde '28 (right)

By LANGAN GARRETT
Staff Writer

The Spencer Prize Speech Competition is an annual event hosted by Oratory Now that showcases the public speaking abilities of the First Year class. Participants progress through a nomination process in their First Year seminar, followed by two rounds of speech competitions, culminating in a final showcase on Jan. 27th.

This year, the finalists were Andrew Baay '29, Talia Shilling Rabin '29, Brianna Acosta-Garcia '29, Lillian Tracy '29, Mary Bosco '28.5 and Valentina Askar '29. The winner was Tracy, who discussed her sociology class and the Quantified Self.

Students share something they learned or realized through a Middlebury class, how it connects to something in their own life, and to convince the audience why they should care, too. The final round — held in McCullough this year — features five finalists and includes a $500 cash prize for the winner. The competition aims to teach students important lessons about themselves, the things they care about, and how they connect to their academic journey at Middlebury.

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NEW CENTER FOR STUDENT SUCCESS TO STREAMLINE STUDENT SUPPORT

By MINA RIZK
Contributing Writer

On Feb. 4, Dean of Students Joe Russell announced the launch of the Center for Student Success, a new centralized hub designed to streamline access to student resources and support.

"Beginning this spring, Middlebury is launching the Center for Student Success," Russell wrote in an email to students. "A new, integrated hub designed to make it easier for you to access support and guidance throughout your time at the College." The Center for Student Success consolidates several previously separate offices — including Class Deans, Care Management and Equity Initiatives — into a single, coordinated team.

Following the retirement of Scott Barnicle, dean of senior year experience, in Aug. 2025, after 26 years of working at the college, leadership decided to rethink the entire model, assess its current functions, and identify new ways to adapt and innovate.

Last spring, the college offered early retirement to eligible staff as part of wider cost-saving initiatives.

"The new model was designed after one of the class deans retired as part of the Vermont Staff Retirement Incentive Program that was offered in Spring 2025," Russell wrote in an email to the Campus.

Under the new model, students will not be assigned to a designated class dean, instead they will have access to a team of student deans. The Center aims to ensure continuity of care and reduce delays caused by dean availability. The Center will house five Assistant Deans for Student Success, one Assistant Dean for Academic Success, one Student Success Coordinator and an Operations Manager. The team will report to Smita Ruzicka, vice president for student affairs, and Russell.

"The new structure provides a greater level of integrated support for students – who are able to access broader supports in one place rather than having to go to different offices and have separate conversations," Russell wrote to the Campus. "The model also allows a little more flexibility given the team approach instead of limiting access to a single person based on class year."

By allowing students to work with multiple deans, the Center aims to ensure continuity of care and reduce delays caused

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BSU AND BLACK STUDIES PROGRAM CELEBRATE BLACK CULTURE THROUGH BLACK HISTORY MONTH AND BEYOND

MET LY / THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

A chalk mural drawn by Nancy Rivera '27 and a table with Black History themed materials inside the Anderson Freeman Center.

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them as BSU in whatever avenues they decide to pursue."

Sanjurjo is currently working with the Anderson Freeman Center (AFC) to organize shuttles to Burlington on Feb. 28th for an event called The Black Experience. The event is described as "a holistic celebration of Vermont's Black lived experience," hosted by Flynn Theatre, featuring author and activist Ibram X. Kendi.

Nachula also emphasized the diversity in programming is to showcase the breadth and diversity in Black culture: "[The various collaborations and events] is to show that the Black experience and being Black is not a monolith."

"People have a lot of preconceived notions about what the Black experience is," Nachula said. "Being able to flip those and showing people that it can be multiple different things is something that's very important to us."

Organizers are also thinking beyond February.

"I'm always really suspicious of Black History Month because it seems like it's the only time we celebrate Black culture," Philogene said. "I think these conversations should be happening all the time."

The film series starts in February and runs through the whole spring semester as part of a continuous effort.

Sanjurjo emphasized a programming philosophy BSU has implemented, which is to hold consistent weekly but low-stakes meetings throughout the year — the only culturally-based organization to do so on campus.

"We have learned that minority students are probably the majority of student workers on campus as well as in town," he explained. Given their demanding schedules, weekly open-door drop-in sessions are more effective than mandatory attendance meetings.

After February's celebrations, these meetings will build toward the Night of Black Culture featuring planned performances and celebrations, a tradition that has its roots in the 1980s, according to Sanjurjo.

Organizers generally expressed appreciation for institutional support for the programming.

"What I am very happy about is that Middlebury has been very committed to us doing the work that we do," Philogene said. "I have not gotten any 'don't teach that class' or 'don't have this film.'"

Nachula expressed appreciation for the AFC, the college's center for underrepresented students, for their support in both advice and resources.

"I don't think we'd be able to do half the things we do if it weren't for Derisa and Steve," Nachula said. "A lot of cultural organizations can say the same." Derisa Collymore is the executive director of the AFC, and Steve Zatarain '15 is the assistant director.

This programming comes at a time when Black Student Unions and other cultural organizations are being shuddered nationwide due to anti-diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) bills. Since 2023, 141 of these bills have been introduced, and 29 have become law across a majority of states.

"We'll continue to do this work [...] because [it's] so important," Philogene said, framing it as part of a broader "liberatory process."

"One of Michael and I's main aims for this semester is to make BSU an environment where everybody is welcomed and comfortable," Nachula said. "Regardless of your background or identity within the Black community and even if you're an ally, we want to foster a space where everyone can congregate, celebrate and cultivate a sense of shared understanding around Black Culture."

First Year Foundations: Lillian Tracy '29 Wins Oratory Now's Spencer Prize Speech Competition

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Zane Malarkey '28, one of the executive producers, participated in the Spencer Prize competition last year and joined Oratory Now soon afterwards, before serving on the organizing committee for this year's competition. He started working with Ben Powers, associate director of Oratory Now, and Yasmina Errahioui '28 this past October. Malarkey explained how the process and competition have changed slightly over the past year and outlined the new features added. They included adding speech coaches and students from previous years' competitions to mentor the new participants.

"The coaches complete a 10-hour course over three weekends of the fundamentals, philosophy, and sort of how to coach. The mentor system...was something that we piloted this year," Malarkey said.

Malarkey emphasized the importance of supporting each speaker and helping them lengthen their speeches. Baay, one of the finalists, emphasized his appreciation for the mentorship program, how it helped him to develop his thoughts and organize his speech ideas. He reflected on how his mentor, Lily Jensen '28, provided consistent feedback and supported him throughout the process.

"Lily taught me that speech writing is completely different than normal writing...When she made me have that realization, I was able to jot down my thoughts and actually chop down my sentences, because that sounded better than speaking," Baay said. "It actually became more clear to me when I just started brainstorming my ideas out loud of what I wanted to talk about more...They asked me to go deeper and to die in the stories and to provide imagery."

Shilling Rabin, another finalist, highlighted the collaborative nature of the speech performance process and how she learned from her peers as they delivered their speeches. She incorporated some of these nuances and personal touches into her own speech.

"[It was] interesting, just to see how many little elements play into making an interesting speech, like the way that people gesture or the certain tone that they use [and] pauses. It was really just so interesting to see all these little elements and how much of an effect they can have," Shilling Rabin said.

Oratory Now also serves as a student job for many. Xander Bowles '26, finalist for the winter 2023 Spencer Prize, noted how the program provides employment and community. "Oratory Now has been my on-campus job since freshman year, given me a community of people I wouldn't have otherwise connected with, and made me a much better speaker than I would have been," Bowles wrote in a message to The Campus. Bowles was a light and sound technician for this year's competition.

There was variety in the topics: Baay discussed mindfulness; Shilling Rabin discussed gender and the body. Bosco discussed cannibalism and elements of her cultural anthropology class, Askar spoke about lying and storytelling; Acosta-Garcia discussed her global health class and social stratification.

Spencer Prize winner, Tracy, discussed the confidence she had going into the competition: "The confidence [came from] the fact that I was genuinely stimulated by the things that I had learned last semester," Tracy said. "It was kind of incredible to see how an idea that started off really small from a class could really take form into something that everybody can relate to and appreciate, because I didn't think my little thought that I had loved presenting on in my sociology class could become what it was."

Acosta-Garcia spoke about her prior public speaking engagements and experience, which she found enlightening, and noted that the opportunity to educate others about a subject she is passionate about is unique.

"I really love theater, I love acting...I loved speaking in public and screaming and being dramatic, and that really helped the presentations...[my mentor] Mac told me to come to [Oratory Now] with an open mind...It's okay that this is my story and I know it better than anybody else," Acosta-Garcia said.

Bosco expressed similar sentiments and observations and expressed her gratitude for the moment and the opportunity.

"I think the bottom line for any good story is to just show people that you care, and what you care about...I think that's what lends to the most moving stories that people can hear...I think seeing other people be passionate about it and care a lot about the process really encouraged and inspired me to be brave and get up the courage to go on stage," Bosco said.

Editor's Note: Managing Editor Yuvraj Shah '26 and Design Director Joanne Zhang '29 contributed reporting to this article.

CIA CAREER TALK AT ROHATYN CENTER DRAWS PROTEST

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"Middlebury students have been protesting CIA visits, talks, and recruitment campaigns for decades," protestor Aren Lau '27 wrote in an email to the Campus. "We recognize the unforgivable crimes of the CIA and Middlebury's mission of preparing students "to practice ethical citizenship at home and far beyond our Vermont campus," according to its own mission statement, is desecrated by these events."

Ava Raiser '28, another student in Consentino's class who attended the talk, said she viewed the protest as effective in drawing attention to the issue but wished it had taken a different form.

"They got people talking about it, so that's something in itself. Props to them. They were very brave in what they did," Raiser said. "I think they could have better facilitated a dialogue. These protesters are advocating for freedom of speech, and in that fight, you sort of have to stay true to your values."

According to Maniatis, the protestors made noise during the talk, including knocking over water bottles, rustling papers, and typing loudly.

Another protestor, Finley Torrens-Martin '28 wrote that the protest sought to disrupt the event and convince other students not to join the organization.

"The goals of the protest were to disrupt the event, prevent the speaker from convincing people to join the CIA, and tell Middlebury that we don't want an organization that has committed international crimes," Torrens-Martin wrote in an email to The Campus.

The CIA has had a long relationship with the college. The language schools have been a resource for CIA training since the Arabic Summer Language program began in 1982, and Middlebury has hosted CIA recruitment drives for at least that long. This partnership has been met with criticism and protest from students who feel that the CIA's history represents an ideological and material threat to the college community.

"Higher education should not be a place where language is weaponized to serve governments or actions many consider immoral," protestor Liam Morris '26 said in an interview with the Campus. "As a member of this community, I don't believe that kind of involvement belongs on our campus."

"The CIA's a secretive organization, so when you get a chance to learn about that, it's cool," said Maniatis. "I wouldn't say I have particular feelings about the CIA. I understand it's essential to national security, so you can't get rid of it. I also realize there's definitely skeletons."

Torrens-Martin believed that the protest was successful. "I think we were also very successful in disrupting the meeting itself. The speaker was reasonably distracted by our tactics and our persistent questions showed how little he was willing to actually answer real questions from the public."

The CIA's relationship with Middlebury students has historically been somewhat fraught.

This past summer, Middlebury students Ryan Ulen '26 and Violet Gordon '26 faced threats of disciplinary action (now rescinded by the college) for handing out pamphlets regarding the CIA's record of violence and global destabilization. In the summer of 2019, a student in Middlebury's Arabic graduate language program was investigated (and subsequently cleared) for speaking about kidnappings and torturings perpetrated by the CIA at a recruitment talk.

Raiser, another student in Mr. Consentino's class offered a more moderate perspective in an interview. "The CIA has done some pretty horrible things. That's something that I agree with, that's something that I acknowledge. When it comes to the protesters, I 100% agree with their issues with the CIA. Philip does too. But ultimately, what is a Middlebury education if not to best understand the systems around us?"

Editor's note: News Editor Rachelle Talbert '28, Managing Editor Yuvraj Shah '26 and Editor-in-Chief Mandy Berghela '26 contributed reporting to this article. Theo Maniatis '28.5 is a sports editor for The Campus.

New center for student success to streamline student support

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by dean availability. According to the website, emails to the Center are currently processed based on urgency and can take up to 10 working days to receive a response.

Some students found that the new model addresses challenges they faced when navigating student support systems.

"I wish I had a less fragmented system. I sometimes found it a little complicated to navigate through what felt like loopholes to get the support or resource I was looking for," Giselle Palma '28 said. "I'm an orientation leader, so I am glad that incoming students will have an established system that they can easily navigate amongst the chaos of being a first-year."

YiJun Kim '26 said she supports the new system, noting that it allows students to maintain continuity in relationships they have already built with their class deans.

"I think having to deal with a new dean can sometimes be discouraging for students who have already adjusted to a particular class," Kim said. "There will be less work for students who are already very busy and occupied with many commitments."

Another student, Ariella Frommer '28.5, agrees.

"As someone with heavy extracurricular involvement on campus, I am glad that there is now a space where I can go to as a one-stop shop for all information under this new model. The previous model would make me a little less inclined due to the amount of steps and time I'd have to take to access a particular resource."

According to the website, The Center for Student Success brings together services related to academic performance, mentorship & advising, involvement with campus life, financial stability, health & wellbeing and confidence & efficacy. The center is staffed by five assistant deans for student success, one assistant dean for academic success, a student success coordinator and an operations manager. The team reports to the Vice President of Student Affairs, Smita Ruzicka and Russell.

Currently, the offices of different deans are located across Battell Hall, Allen Hall and the Anderson Freeman Center. Russell added that, following the demolition of Old Battell Hall, the deans are identifying a campus location for all to reside.

"We are actively working on the future location of the Center, but have not yet finalized those plans," Russell wrote to the Campus.

Editors note: Managing Editor Yuvraj Shah '26 contributed reporting to this article.

Game Night...

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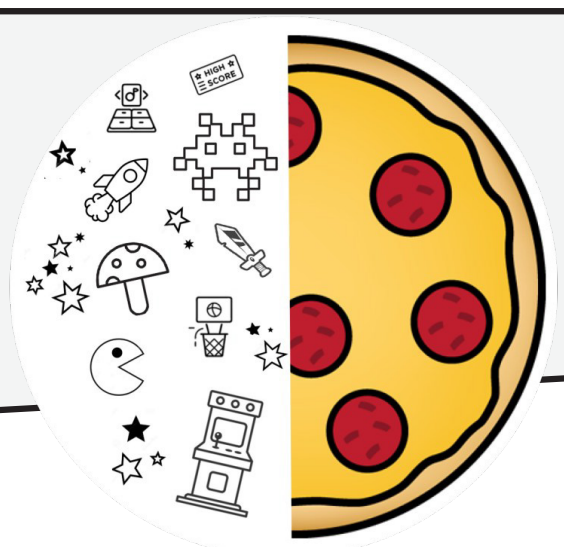

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WATERFRONT DIVING CENTER TO OFFER CERTIFICATION CLASSES FOR STUDENTS THIS SPRING

By ANNA DOUCET
Contributing Writer

Initially, the snowy hills of Vermont may not seem like the place for SCUBA (Self-contained underwater breathing apparatus) diving; however, Middlebury College and the greater Vermont community have a thriving SCUBA diving community. The college's SCUBA Diving Club has historically provided training and dive opportunities to students, faculty, and staff. Although the club is no longer active on campus, many students and faculty are interested in bringing SCUBA back to Middlebury.

Totaling six classes in total, students who participate in and pass the course will become NAUI (National Association of Underwater Instructors) Divers. This certification allows students to purchase or rent equipment, join dive charters, or participate in any SCUBA activity.

Any students who complete the course will be eligible for final certification dives in Lake Champlain in late spring or early summer. Additionally, they will receive a Physical Education (PE) credit for their participation in the class.

The course was coordinated by Professor of Luso-Hispanic Studies Miguel Fernández and Kreig Pinkham, the training director for the Waterfront Diving Center.

"We know that SCUBA courses at the collegiate level offer us an opportunity to connect students with SCUBA education for both personal recreation and career-driven reasons. We've had students who have gone on to careers in marine sciences and technology and exposing college students to the sport early is a great thing," Pinkham said.

The Waterfront Diving Center was established in 1988. The organization provides snorkeling and SCUBA opportunities to the Vermont community, with the goal of providing a high-quality way for Vermonters to engage underwater with Vermont and beyond.

The Waterfront Diving Center has a longstanding partnership with the Physical Education department at the University of Vermont. On average, they enroll 20 students per semester in SCUBA training courses, earning them a PE credit through the experience. Pinkman is interested in starting a similar program at Middlebury.

"We used to teach at the college years ago. I'm not even sure why that stopped, but there seems to be some interest in us picking that up again. We're certainly interested," Pinkman said.

Doug Altshuler '26 was a member of the now-dormant Dive Club. Similar to Pinkham, Altshuler believes that Middlebury students would be very interested in SCUBA opportunities if they were available.

"I learned how to dive here in Vermont, and I think it is the best place to learn. Lake Champlain has tons of wreck dives that are very beginner-friendly, so I'm really excited for all the people who get certified at Midd so they can experience that," Altshuler said.

"I'd be very interested in getting certified during college, so it's great to hear that Waterfront Diving Center plans to do more classes on campus; it's much more convenient to have resources here and at the college pool than having to go up to Burlington." Xander Bowles '26 told The Campus.

For students interested in a non-traditional way to earn their PE credit or simply passionate about exploring the underwater world, Pinkham believes SCUBA is a great opportunity.

"We are hoping to keep the momentum going and find a way to introduce this to students earlier next year," Pinkham said.

HAYMAKER BUN & CO. HOSTED A FUNDRAISING GALENTINE'S EVENT IN COLLABORATION WITH ATRIA COLLECTIVE

By KATRINA SCHWARZ
Senior Local Editor

On Friday, Feb. 13, the usual daytime aroma of fresh pastry at Haymaker Bun & Co. was replaced by the neon glow of a karaoke machine and a high-energy playlist. The space, typically known for morning coffees and fantastic breakfast buns, transformed into a vibrant community hub where the clinking of dinner plates mingled with applause for every singer who took the mic.

The occasion was a fundraising Galentine's Day dinner and karaoke event hosted in support of Atria Collective, a nonprofit providing critical services for survivors of sexual and domestic violence. While the annual celebration was previously hosted by Adventure Dinner, this year marked the event's debut at Haymaker, bringing the community together for a night of song and solidarity.

Caroline Corrente, the owner of Haymaker and board member of Atria, explained how the Galentine's event came to take place at the popular coffee spot.

"It takes a lot for [Adventure Dinner] to do, and like all of us restaurants, finances are tight and we are all trying to keep our heads above water," she said. "[Haymaker's] been doing karaoke, trying to do karaoke once a month and we've been doing it for nonprofits, as benefits for nonprofits... So, I figured this could be a fun way to continue to spread joy and bring awareness to the amazing work that Atria is doing."

Madeliene Kiblinger '26 attended the Galentine's Day fundraiser with a couple of friends and shared her thoughts regarding the event with the Campus.

"It was nice to see women of all ages coming together with joy and laughter and cute outfits to celebrate each other and support such an important cause," Kiblinger said.

Attendance required a $20 ticket, which included a special dinner menu featuring Arcadian's handmade pasta dishes, cocktails and a raffle.

Every dollar raised through these tickets was earmarked for the logistical costs that keep the 24-hour hotline staffed and the advocacy programs running.

"Funds go to our work. A lot of that will be to support our day-to-day operations and to support direct services for survivors," Elyssa Boiselle, the executive director of the Atria Collective said.

Atria, located on 16 Seymour St., operates a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week crisis hotline where survivors and victims can call and speak directly with a trained advocate, who can immediately connect them to critical resources and community partners. Atria also offers medical accompaniment, meeting survivors of assault in Porter Hospital and supporting interactions with law enforcement and medical personnel.

"One of the things I love about Atria is that we are working with someone from education, for free, and hopefully before abuse happens, doing prevention work in that sense, all the way through long-term healing. We are with you through the process as long as you want, by your side," Jena Santa Maria, the associate executive director of the organization said.

The organization will be hosting two workshops geared towards helping both youth and caregivers navigate several challenges that young people may face, and how those challenges can impact one another.

"April is Child Abuse Prevention Month as well as Sexual Assault Awareness Month, so we are doing two workshops, one youth-focused and one for parents and caregivers. We will be talking about the intersection of unhealthy relationships, substance use, technology and how those all come together to play in the lives of youth," Santa Maria said.

Atria's spring volunteer training will occur at the end of April, where volunteers can be trained in how to become a crisis advocate for Atria's hotline.

"College students are great for that. You all make wonderful volunteers on our hotline," Santa Maria said.

Corrente encouraged the involvement of Middlebury students in a call to action, especially in the wake of MiddSafe (a student-run hotline) being shut down earlier last fall. The dissolution of MiddSafe earlier this academic year marked the end of a long-standing peer-led support system on campus.

"Now is a great time to think about, as a student, to decide what path you might want to take in your career and in your life," Corrente said. "So many of these tiny organizations are so dependent on federal funding and have gotten absolutely decimated by this administration and by DOGE. Now is the time to try to give back in any way you can, or at least that's how I feel. I implore you all to do the same and think about what that looks like for you."

COMMUNITY PANEL EXPLORES CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

By LIZZY DELLIT
Staff Writer

On Wednesday, Feb. 11, a crowd gathered at Champlain Valley Unitarian Universalist Society to listen to a panel of experts on the subject of middle schoolers' mental health during an event titled "Fostering Resilience and Hope in Our Children Today."

The panel consisted of local experts on children and psychology: Matthew Kimble, a former Chair and current professor in psychology at Middlebury College; Laura Basili, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist in town who teaches part time at the college; Wylie Cate, a licensed clinical social worker who runs a private practice; and author Tal Birdsey, a teacher and the head of School at the North Branch School, the small, private Ripton middle school that assembled the panel. The discussion was moderated by Bill McKibben.

In attendance were students from the college, local middle schoolers and Addison County educators and parents.

Rose McVay, a teacher and associate head of North Branch, helped coordinate the event and watched from the audience. She explained the importance of organizing this event.

"In our school, we have more kids feeling more anxious or stressed and getting overwhelmed more easily. We do attribute a lot of this to the new digital world, which can divide our lives into the real world and that world with all of its accountability issues and algorithms," McVay said

Addressing the specific needs of their students has been an ongoing initiative within the close-knit North Branch community. A few months ago, the school invited Kimble to speak to the middle schoolers about resilience.

"I think they recognize that kids at that age always have particular needs. I think they're also recognizing that middle schoolers these days have particular challenges and are seeing this manifest in their students in ways they haven't before," Kimble said.

Kimble came to North Branch to explain how to navigate those challenges with resilience.

"Resilience is technically, and it started fundamentally as an engineering term to reflect structures that bounce back after stress," he said.

At North Branch, resilience is incorporated into the curriculum.

"[Students] trust themselves to use their experience to figure things out, to make the best decisions they can, and importantly, they also trust that they have support –– people they are connected to that they can go to if they are in trouble. They are connected to themselves that way, and they are connected to their peers, to trusted adults and to a community that way," McVay said.

Wednesday night's conversation echoed that theme. To start, the panelists shared what they considered key differences between how they grew up and today's generation. Themes of childhood risk-taking and social connection without technology were prominent. The conversation then moved to the challenge of technology, prompting Kimble to reference psychologist Jonathan Haidt's thought that "smartphones are an experience blocker."

The panelists discussed how often children resort to their phones when faced with an uncomfortable situation, rather than processing their emotions or pausing before reacting. Basili and Cate both described the need for alternative response methods. They suggested listening to a podcast or music, doing something creative, or simply going on a walk.

The panel also addressed anxiety within parents. Kimble stated that a child's anxiety could be, in part, a result of the anxiety manifested in their parents.

"[Parents] have to support them more in their becoming. They have to show them what we want them to do. That means not being on our devices as well," Basili said.

Cate suggested "Ask Lisa," a podcast she and Basili follow, as a resource for the event's audience. The podcast focuses on "future-proofing" children. Future-proofing refers to helping children prepare not for individual stressors, but for managing their emotions when something does not go as planned or a significant disappointment arises. Above all, Cate emphasized, "Don't escape. Don't check out. Don't leave the hard class. Teach your children to sit with the hard things."

Following the panel and a Q&A session, the audience had an opportunity to mingle and reflect on the key takeaways.

For instance, Malia Rutherford '26, who is also in Kimble's senior seminar, "Resilience" hopes to spend more time having face-to-face interactions.

"I've definitely become much more of a texting freak in the last few years," Rutherford said.

Madeline Murphy, a fourteen-year-old who attends North Branch School, reflected on the local community's support. "I think that really what I've taken away is that there's such a community behind helping kids," Murphy said.

With the conclusion of the event, McVay hopes parents and students will walk away with new tools to help them navigate today's world.

"One [is] the importance of encouraging healthy connections with self, peer groups, trusted adults, wider family, and communities to foster resilience. Helping them to recognize the power of their own stories in their own unique words, both spoken and written. Getting kids involved," said McVay. "I feel like the conversation has just started and the world will keep changing, and we will need new tools to best support our kids," she added.

WE SHOULD PROTEST — WITH PURPOSE

Op-Ed

Theo Maniatis *is a Sports Editor and a member of the class of 2028.5.*

I figured this wouldn't be an ordinary career talk when I arrived at the Robert A. Jones House (RAJ) on Jan. 20th, and a student handed me a packet with a headline emblazoned in white: "The CIA is a Terrorist Organization."

The CIA "terrorist" that afternoon was a retired analyst and Middlebury alum, Phillip Consentino '00, who was there to discuss lessons from his lengthy career. I knew him as the mild-mannered, thoughtful professor teaching my J-Term class; while I don't intend to join the CIA, I was keen to learn more.

However, with protestors accounting for half of the 40 students present, a productive conversation never stood a chance. A protest should aim to have a positive impact and draw attention to an issue, but this one only seemed to alienate students who were trying to learn. I thought the protesters could at least have explored other ways to make their point before disrupting the conversation.

The protestors sounded alarm horns, stomped, typed loudly, rustled paper, coughed, and knocked over water bottles. Among the interruptions were questions about whether the CIA "still hired Nazis" and pursued "creative torture tactics."

The former analyst explained his perspective, arguing that open discussion is essential to understanding U.S. national security policy. He offered to talk afterwards with the protestors or go out for coffee in town with them, even though the events he'd been questioned about happened before he worked for the CIA. No one took him up on the offer. The protestors marched out of the building, chanting: "CIA, Terrorists in Action!"

Protests are a crucial part of our commitment to debate and free speech – and they can be meaningful. In the 1970s, student protests nationwide helped pressure Washington to pull out of Vietnam. Some 250 Middlebury College students took part, marching down College Street toward the local draft office in town. Uncovering this story in the archives, I felt proud of the alumni who organized what was the first major protest in Middlebury's history.

Last May, I was similarly inspired when over 300 Middlebury community members gathered outside the Old Chapel to challenge staff budget cuts and urge the administration to support its hard-working employees. But in the RAJ that day, I felt deflated by the interruptions, which seemed to have no clear objective.

There were other ways to raise awareness about legitimate ethical concerns with the CIA — through a J-Term workshop on the history of the agency, a talk on campus, or an op-ed. In the past, Middlebury students have explored those routes. In 1983, students condemned the CIA's violation of human rights in a Campus op-ed and five years ago, a group started a petition to ban recruitment sessions on campus from the CIA, FBI and NSA.

However, the students responsible for those efforts have since graduated. With the chance to convince a new generation of students, the protestors chose to heckle a professor and ask unserious questions. It was clear that dialogue and mutual understanding weren't their goals.

My guess is that the protestors wanted to create enough commotion to discourage future partnerships between Middlebury and the CIA — whether that means hosting a retired analyst on campus or holding a formal recruiting event. In the long run, however, hounding the agency off campus won't influence how the CIA is run. The muddled afternoon didn't even make it onto Public Safety's radar, let alone Langley's. If the protestors wanted to effect change within the CIA, their best shot would have been to ask advice from the retired analyst in the room.

COURTESY PHOTO / MIDDLEBURY SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

Middlebury student protestors march down College Street to protest the Vietnam War in 1970.

In the future, we should protest with purpose, not only to disrupt. A protest can be a valuable tool to effect change and has been throughout American history. It's unhelpful, however, to protest without a goal, to use it only as a megaphone to shout our opinions. If you plan on taking people's attention, it's important to have something worthwhile to say.

In the end, the RAJ conversation wasn't a complete waste of an hour. After the protestors had departed, the remaining 20 or so students lingered to ask questions. What was supposed to last an hour was successfully crammed into the next 15 minutes. When I met with the former analyst afterwards, he said he wasn't angry at the protestors. His only regret was that they never reached out to talk to him.

WHERE IS OUR PRESIDENT?

Op-Ed

Daniza Tazabekova *is a member of the class of 2026.*

Last year, I had the privilege of serving as Vice President of the Student Government Association (SGA). For three years now, I've had a front-row seat to how SGA administrations campaign, govern, and ultimately follow through on the promises they make to the student body. I know what engaged leadership and accountability look like, so I can confidently say that President Nicole Meyers' '26 administration falls noticeably short of that standard.

Student government is often dismissed as a training ground for "real politics" or a resume line for the civically ambitious. But at Middlebury, it has historically been far more consequential. Past administrations have demonstrated that campus governance can produce tangible, meaningful change when leaders treat their roles with seriousness and urgency.

Take President Abed Abbas' '24 administration. During one of the most politically charged periods in campus history, marked by encampments and free speech protests, his team released a free speech resolution that clarified institutional values and student protections at a moment when many were unsure where the College stood. His administration also worked directly with faculty to lower graduation requirements from 36 to 34 credits — a structural, academic reform that materially improved students' academic flexibility and well-being.

Or, consider President B Striker's '25 tenure, which saw record-high voter turnout in SGA elections and the highest reported levels of student satisfaction. His administration partnered with Dining Services on a series of initiatives, including the launch of Newtella — a healthier, more environmentally sustainable alternative to Nutella — and a new to-go cup system that reduced waste and improved convenience for students on the move. Striker also organized the first annual Staff Appreciation Day to recognize the unseen labor that sustains daily student life, and expanded the Break Bus service to the local Amtrak line to promote equity and affordability.

These examples matter because they set a precedent that campaign promises are meant to be fulfilled, leadership is meant to be visible, and governance is meant to function.

Which brings us to the present administration.

President Meyers campaigned on community building, advocacy, and structural improvements. Yet months into the academic year, students are still waiting for signs of follow-through. The public SGA roster online remains outdated. One vice president is abroad, and the other has graduated, leaving the already quiet executive branch even less accessible to the student body. Visibility matters in governance, so when the most basic public-facing materials aren't updated, it signals disengagement and disconnection from the student body.

President Meyers' campaign platform particularly emphasized improving the J-Term experience. Through her "Winter Blues Busters" initiative, she pledged to organize a series of SGA-sponsored indoor and outdoor community-building events designed to combat isolation during one of the coldest and most socially limited periods of the academic year. At the same time, she committed to expanding equitable access to the Snow Bowl by creating a streamlined pathway for students with demonstrated financial need to receive free ski passes, and by advocating for a policy allowing first-year students to transfer their complimentary ski pass to a later year if academic obligations prevented its use.

J-Term passed without any SGA-sponsored community programming, and ski access reform remains unrealized. In a season defined by burnout, winter fatigue and financial barriers to recreation, those absences did not go unnoticed. This inaction feels especially stark given that mental health advocacy was a central pillar of President Meyers' campaign. Students were promised stronger attention to wellbeing, greater institutional coordination and more visible support. Yet there has been no major public initiative, no renewed push for mental health reform and no visible mobilization of campus resources from the Meyers administration. In a year when our campus mourned the loss of a student, that absence of leadership felt particularly heavy.

Her campaign even proposed small but symbolic gestures to build campus connection, including double-sided dining hall cards that would invite students to sit together, with one side reading, "I'd love it if someone joined me." It was a clever idea, rooted in the understanding that community is built through everyday interactions. I haven't personally seen these cards throughout the dining halls, but I agree with the sentiment. I would love it if Nicole joined us.

Middlebury students are thoughtful, politically engaged and deeply invested in the well-being of this community. We show up for each other, our causes and the institution we represent. It's precisely because of that investment that we look to the student government for visible, responsive leadership. I am not asking for perfection; I am simply asking for presence.

HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?

The Campus accepts submissions of opinions, reflections and letters to the editor from all members of our community, every week. Pieces from students, staff and faculty are all welcomed for consideration.

Email us at campus@middlebury.edu

FREEDOM OF SPEECH, RESPONSIBILITY TO LISTEN

Op-Ed

C. Genevieve Stone *is a Copy Editor and a member of the class of 2029.* ***Elisabeth Dellit*** *is a Staff Writer and a member of the class of 2029.*

We were at dinner on January 19th when Elisabeth Dellit received a message from her Migrant Justice group chat alerting the club's members about a meeting that night to organize a protest against a career conversation with Phillip Cosentino '00. Cosentino recently retired after 25 years in the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), serving as a counterterrorism and extremist radicalization analyst.

Having planned to attend the career conversation herself because of her interest in a career as a public servant, Dellit didn't attend the meeting to rally against Cosentino and the CIA. She also went through with her plans to attend and brought two of her friends.

At the career conversation on January 20th, two students handed out pamphlets titled, "The CIA is a Terrorist Organization." The pamphlet succeeded in raising questions about the moral implications of working at the CIA. It also effectively informed students about the tensions between students and the CIA's presence at Middlebury.

It appeared that the protest would end with the pamphlets. However, it quickly became clear that Migrant Justice's goal was to disrupt the entire conversation, which was neither a recruitment event nor a pro-CIA rally.

Before Cosentino began to speak about his experience, he prefaced that the CIA is a controversial organization and welcomed students to come to him directly afterwards, or even to join him for coffee.

At first, people were called on, then asked to wait until the end, and finally, questions turned into full-blown interruptions.

Then came the noise.

At first, it was an innocent cough here and there. A water bottle clattered on the linoleum. Then it became a cacophony of continual stomping, coughing, lip smacking, and the rattling of keys. Ringtones and alarms were going off in succession. Paper towels were being dispensed and torn obnoxiously loudly. It became nearly impossible to hear or concentrate on Consentino.

As American citizens, we have the right and responsibility to hold our government accountable for its actions and mistakes. However, we must consider the individual in addition to the organization he represents, and act accordingly.

In fairness to the protestors, Consentino was not directly answering their questions about the controversial, sometimes horrific, missions of the CIA. However, he had stated his agenda beforehand: To explain his career and then answer questions.

Speaking with Consentino after the event, we learned that no one had taken him up on the offer to have coffee or even engage in an honest conversation with him. No intellectual growth came from the protests, nor a moment of healthy debate.

They wanted to take away his platform. And by doing so, they lost their ability to have the vitally needed discourse at this school.

Having served as governor of Vermont from 2003–2011, (R) Jim Douglas '72 spoke briefly at the kickoff of the first College Democrat-Republican joint meeting earlier in the year about the importance of civil conversation. "People didn't always agree with me, but they never thought that I should not be heard," he remarked. This is the mentality Middlebury College needs to take in this political environment.

It's hard to listen to people we fundamentally disagree with, especially on a moral or ethical level. But everyone deserves respect. We hope the Middlebury community can agree on that.

RESPONSE TO ALEXANDER HAMILTON FORUM TALK

Op-Ed

The Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies *and* ***The Feminist Resource Center***

The Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies and the Feminist Resource Center want to express our concern and dismay at today's Alexander Hamilton Forum talk featuring a "conservative feminist," Leah Libresco Sargeant, who defines women as immutably biologically different from men. We believe that all oppression is linked and that separating one marginalized group from another will not lead to a more just and equitable world. Further, we stand by decades of interdisciplinary feminist scholarship that has debunked a binary view of sex, informed by the work of biologists who recognize more than two sexes, as well as by research into the limits of using hormones or body parts to determine sex or gender.

Why are our views relevant to Thursday's event? In her work, Sargeant intentionally excludes trans women from the category of women. Further, her book frames nonbinary identities as fearful and confused responses to a predatory patriarchy. While we agree that patriarchy hypersexualizes young women, the speaker's argument is a dogwhistle for a common right-wing talking point which claims that non-normative gender identities are merely expressions of "social contagion."

As feminists, we stand in solidarity with trans, intersex and non-binary individuals, just as we stand in solidarity with groups marginalized by class, race, dis/ability, citizenship status, or religion. We question why our colleagues at the Hamilton Forum, which has a history of taking dark money from right-wing donors, would consistently hold events denying the validity of trans identity and trans-inclusive feminism at a time when transgender peoples' rights are being severely restricted, and gender studies professors are being targeted, suspended and fired for refusing to conform to a biological essentialist gender ideology. Finally, we find it shameful that such an event would be held in the wake of Lia Smith's '26 death by suicide, and of the many other queer and trans student deaths at Middlebury over the past several years.

We invite our fellow colleagues and students to stand in solidarity with all oppressed groups, as well as with gender studies scholars and other disciplines currently under attack. Such attacks rely on misinformation and the false lure of a return to "nature" or "tradition", which has never existed. Manifestos are a fabulous feminist genre; historically, they have served to critique institutions of power from below. While Sargeant's feminist manifesto presents itself as a critique of patriarchy, its arguments in fact align with a right-wing executive power seeking to eliminate any kind of understanding of gender outside of its own narrow worldview.

"We invite our fellow colleagues and students to stand in solidarity with all oppressed groups, as well as with gender studies scholars and other disciplines currently under attack."

LETTER TO THE EDITOR: RESPONSE TO "A SPINELESS PARTY IN AND OUTSIDE THE COLLEGE"

Op-Ed

Vyas Nageswaran *is a member of the class of 2026.*

This article is a response to a Jan 22. letter written by Noah R. Groves titled, "A spineless party in and outside the college," where Groves criticizes the Middlebury College Democrats (MCD) for co-hosting an event with the Middlebury College Republicans (MCR). Groves's letter merits a response not only because of the inherent value of political dialogue, but because some clarifications may mitigate the palpable frustration he feels.

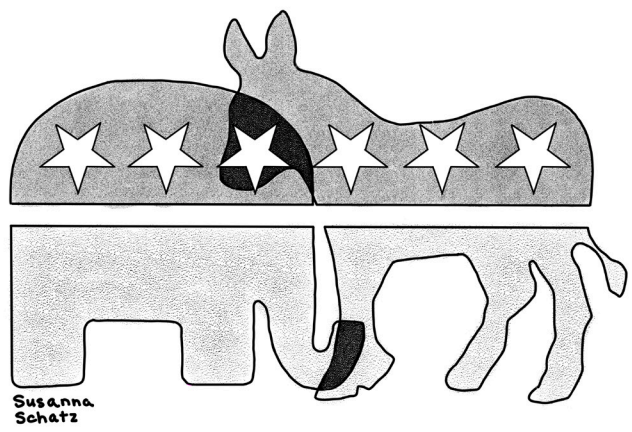
Right off the bat, Groves laments what he describes as the normalization of conservatism by MCD, which he regards as tantamount to an endorsement of Trump's Republican Party. Here itself, Groves's argument starts to fall apart. Firstly, the suggestion that MCD has the power to "normalize" conservatism grossly overstates the organization's abilities. Conservatism is not a fringe political ideology lurking in the periphery and looking to make its way into the mainstream. It is here, has been here for a long time, and isn't going away anytime soon.

Secondly, the author conflates conservatism with MAGA Republicanism: the latter is one version of the former, and they're certainly not interchangeable. Not to mention that there is no longer a consensus on what the MAGA movement is even about. Is it best represented by Nick Fuentes and his army of antisemitic Groypers? By Ben Shapiro and his support for "peace through strength on foreign policy; traditional values in social policy; free markets on economics"? Or perhaps by the retired elementary school teacher I met at a Conflict Transformation event in January 2025, who felt her country was changing beyond recognition and just wanted things to slow down? Your guess is as good as mine.

Thirdly, Groves's position on MCD engaging with their Republican counterparts is mired in conceptual misunderstandings. An invitation to have a conversation does not translate into automatic agreement, and the only thing it says about the leadership of both organizations is that they are committed to upholding the liberal value of dialogue and reducing the scourge of affective polarization.

Lastly, Groves oversimplifies and misdiagnoses the causes of the Democratic Party's loss in the 2024 election. There are many things that hurt the Harris campaign, and providing an exhaustive list of what went wrong would merit its own article. Suffice to say that "pulling towards the center" (if that is even a fair description of what Harris did) pales in comparison to the gaslighting of the public on the state of Biden's cognitive faculties, the haphazard endorsement of Harris's candidacy, and the ignorance of James Carville's aphorism on what really matters during an election ("it's the economy, stupid").

To conclude, I sympathize with Groves's sentiment that "liberal" values are being undermined; it is regrettable, however, that in criticizing MCD for collaborating with their Republican counterparts, he seems to be eschewing the very values he purports to defend. As a senior at Middlebury, I am proud of the progress we've made in becoming more hospitable to diverse viewpoints over the years. To the extent that the bipartisan programming initiated by MCD and MCR serves that cause, I sincerely hope it continues and flourishes.



COLLEGE WILL END: CAREER CHOICES AFTER GRADUATION

Editorial

The editorial represents the opinion of the Middlebury Campus Editorial Board.

The recent student protest at a career conversation talk hosted by a retired CIA agent raised questions about career choices and their moral ramifications. College is a transitional period in which students engage in intense pursuits and self-discovery to prepare for the real world. Students then decide how and where they want to capitalize on their education after graduation.

What is an appropriate career for a Middlebury student? The editorial board could not agree on an answer. The question does not account for privilege, immigration concerns, money constraints, and the reality of a difficult job market. We think Middlebury's role in shaping the future workforce is to encourage students to explore career paths that can improve the world while still serving each student's needs. To do so, Middlebury should encourage broader, all-encompassing career exploration during students' four years.

In an ideal world, everyone would have the financial freedom to choose a career that aligns with their interests and provides meaningful contributions to society. The brightest minds should go into professions that can "save lives" and "change the world." This is an optimistic sentiment, but unfortunately, it is not the reality for most people. That is why a utopia is a fantasy: It is neither indicative of nor an accurate representation of society. In this case, it does not account for all of the factors behind career decisions.

At the end of the day, many Middlebury students will move into lucrative professions in the financial industry, spanning from investment banking to private equity to consulting. It is not a shock that Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley are consistently among the College's top employers. Despite concerns about what working for certain banks and financial corporations means to a liberal arts student who is meant to go forth and "change the world," these types of jobs promise stability and security to high-achieving students. Middlebury's comprehensive fee, reaching almost $100,000 for the 2025-2026 academic year, is reason alone to go down this path.

We call on Middlebury to make a stronger effort to encourage greater career exploration among the student body. Some students enter college with passions that are not necessarily aligned with the most profitable professions. It would be a shame for these students to lose this sense of purpose and self-identity in the face of necessity. The $4,000 summer internship grants for unpaid internships and non-profit work are a step in the right direction. It is an example of the college facilitating the connection between academic interests and career exploration by providing the resources required. MiddCORE's leadership and career exploration programs are another good example of exercises that help students envision their future life choices through an ethical lens. However, the internship stipend is often insufficient, especially after taxes for non-U.S. residents, compared with paid summer internships.

We want to reemphasize that we are not attempting to define certain careers as ethical or unethical. Working certain jobs does not make someone immoral or lacking in integrity. There is room for ethical work in an ethically ambiguous company or job – a definition we could not agree on. The concern lies in how Middlebury is preparing us to use the skills we learned here to enter the realities of the world around us, with their ambiguities.

It is also important to acknowledge the nuances of the institutions we work for rather than sugarcoating or minimizing the effects of certain work. Many industries and companies have caused harm or damage. Rather than being complicit in these wrongdoings, there should be reflection and understanding of the implications of a certain job or profession.

At the end of the day, it is virtually impossible to agree on what is an ethical career choice versus what is not because it does not exist. The important thing is not where you choose to work, but how you choose to carry your personal values into the work you do.

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LIVING THROUGH THEATER: ONE STEP AT A TIME LIKE THIS

By YOYO ZHANG
Arts & Culture Editor

Standing in front of the heavy door of Wright theater, darkness heightened my senses. I could only hear the woman's instructions coming from my head set accompanied by subtle music: open the door. Find a bench. Sit down. I stared at the orange door, hesitated, and slowly followed the instructions. The dim light, the tenderness of every step and the tick-tock of the walking clock forced me to meditate on the intersection of time and space: Wwhere am I? Where am I going next? This is a typical experience of a "Oone step at a time like this" theatrical production, where the audiences are guided through the space, becoming the actor of their own piece.

One step at a time like this is an Australian tTheater cCompany who resided in Middlebury from Jan. 15— through 29. They facilitated multiple student workshops, worked closely with Middlebury faculties and student partners, and continued to develop their piece-in-progress "ALL THE WAYS WITHOUT YOU", which had showings on Jan. 28 and Jan. 29. They aim to break the boundaries of conventional theatre and create audience-centric experiences, which promptingguided them to explore different venues and spaces that they could transformed into playgrounds for the audiences to navigate.

The production partners Suzanne Kersten, Clair Korobacz and Julian Rickert found each other and soon launched the program. They decided to create a 21-year-program which ensures long-term collaboration, allowing them to build an intimate space where they can experiment, fail and continually reinvent their work. Originally, they made shows with audiences sitting down in a theater, but in 2009, Kersten and her partners decided to expand their stage into a city where their audiences could live and act in this theatrical experience.

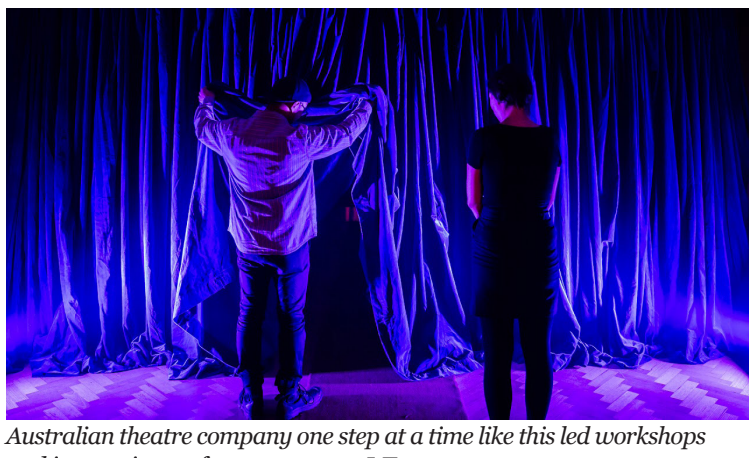
"We want to see the audience walking out in a city, where they could see the world as a heightened experience if given time, a headset and not knowing their destination. You know, when you move through the city, you have a purpose where you often stop to check where you are. But when you are in a city, in a show, and you have no purpose except to follow the instructions, then your senses can open up. We didn't know this when we first did this, but it was just the audience walking with no straight performance — except for the world," Kersten sSaid.

This initial experiment tested whether the simple act of walking could prompt audiences to perceive the world itself as a form of theater. It's accompanied by audios — local music, poetry, and philosophical reflections, which are all designed to heighten visual awareness and anchor participants in the immediacy of the present moment.

Their theatrical production is also unique in its high degree of personalization. They host audiences in very small groups; when the company first developed the walking work, they only took one audience member at a time. Kersten admitted that the showings in Middlebury are the largest groups they have hosted, which is merely 12 audience members — who are split into three groups taking three different routes.

This production also marks the company's first time staging a mobile work focusing on a fully functioning theater. As theater people, they came back to their birthplace with a baby work that re-incorporated the space in an utterly unconventional way. The performers open up the space that was reserved to the acting crew, offering the audience a guided tour of the Wright Theater — from entrances and emergency exits to the conference room, backstage dressing rooms, and the stage itself. The theater's lighting and sound systems further enable the creation of visual illusions and metatheatrical moments. Even the curtains are woven into the performance, adding spatial layers and enclosing the audience onstage to evoke a palpable sense of entrapment.

"ALL THE WAYS WITHOUT YOU" focuses on closely examining specific sites to commemorate the nature that once existed there — the landscapes, habitats, and topography. In one scene set along Otter Creek, audience members are instructed to lie amid marsh grasses and cattails projected by artificial light, meditating to a soundtrack composed of the sounds of growing plants and glaciers. Just as the audience settles into a mood of meditation and tranquility, the atmosphere is sharply interrupted by Rickert, who declares that he has had enough of what he calls a pretentious meditation — one staged in a "natural" setting that is, in reality, constructed through artificial and digital means. He explained firmly:



Australian theatre company one step at a time like this led workshops and interactive performances over J-Term.

COURTESY PHOTO / ONE STEP AT A TIME LIKE THIS

"The truth of the matter is: you're late. You are all late — five or six hundred years late,." Rickert explained. He pointeds out the paradox that to create this meditative experience, the marsh land needs to be drained, the cattails need to be cut, and a theater needs to be built — and all of this, is to replace a real experience with a fake one.

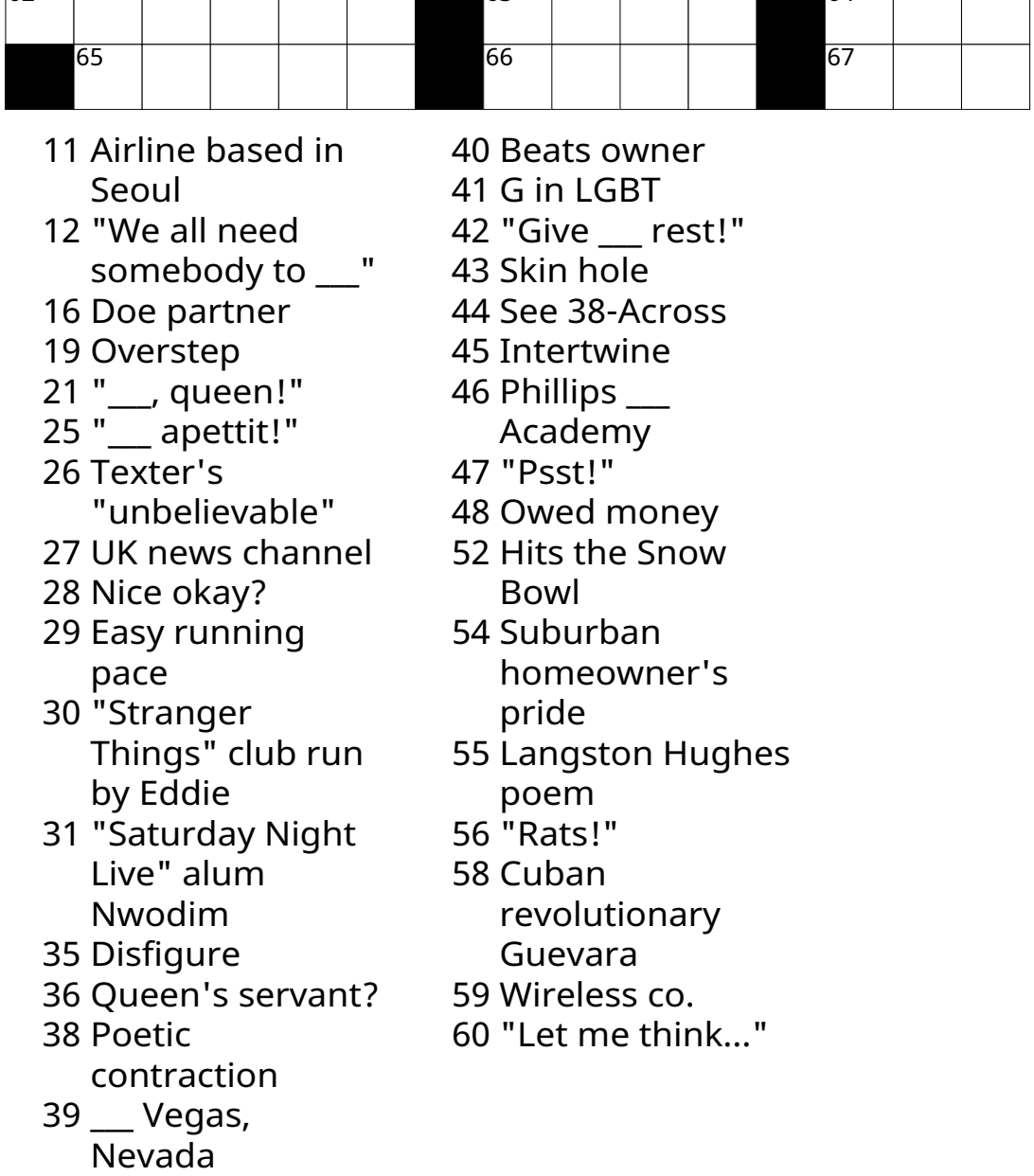
"This theater is built upon the destruction of nature. I really liked this design. While asking you to immerse into this scene, they interrupted themselves, and later asked you to lie down again. This creates a sense of absurdity and encourages reflections," said Jane Zhang '28 said, the student partner of the production.

During their time in Middlebury, the theater company led two student engagement workshops, working closely with students to discuss and reflect on their practice. The sessions centered on debates about the nature of theater, as the artists themselves wrestled with how to define their work. By the end of the discussions, they arrived at the idea of the production as a "heightened experience": once audience members put on the headset, they become both spectators and participants in relation to the world around them.

By transforming everyday spaces into a stage, "one step at a time like this" suggests that life itself is theatrical, awakening our consciousness as actors in our own livesfe.

Back in the Saddle

Egan Turner



ACROSS

1 With 67-Across, a rich holiday beverage
4 One with XY chromosomes
8 Perfect
13 Name found in rainbow mnemonic
14 Make eyes at
15 Hospital employees
17 Co. that created "Jeopardy!"-winning robot
18 1973 Triple Crown winner
20 Versa, Leaf, or Rogue
22 Org. that is parodied in "Heated Rivalry"
23 "Ballerina" actress de Armas
24 Ignited or awesome
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26 Make out, in Manchester
27 Titular character of Netflix animated series
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38 With 44-Down, children's novel about a boy and his dog
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44 2026, according to the Chinese zodiac, and the link between 18-Across, 27-Across, and 57-Across
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50 Gen-___
51 Building wing
52 To be, in Belize
53 Your thinnest skin is found here
57 Children's novel by Anna Sewell
61 "One ___ time!"
62 Software whiz
63 "Divergent" actor James
64 Prevailed
65 "The Morning Show" actress Witherspoon
66 Drive-___
67 See 1-Across

DOWN

1 2026 Team USA flag bearer Jackson
2 Mongolian desert
3 Exercise establishments
4 Art made of patterned stone or glass
5 Tommy Lee Jones' "Men in Black" character
6 Inc.'s cousin
7 Suffix for mountain or auction
8 Not shaded
9 Consisting of two parts
10 Make a mistake
11 Airline based in Seoul
12 "We all need somebody to ___"
16 Doe partner
19 Overstep
21 "___, queen!"
25 "___ apettit!"
26 Texter's "unbelievable"
27 UK news channel
28 Nice okay?
29 Easy running pace
30 "Stranger Things" club run by Eddie
31 "Saturday Night Live" alum Nwodim
35 Disfigure
36 Queen's servant?
38 Poetic contraction
39 ___ Vegas, Nevada
40 Beats owner
41 G in LGBT
42 "Give ___ rest!"
43 Skin hole
44 See 38-Across
45 Intertwine
46 Phillips ___ Academy
47 "Psst!"
48 Owed money
52 Hits the Snow Bowl
54 Suburban homeowner's pride
55 Langston Hughes poem
56 "Rats!"
58 Cuban revolutionary Guevara
59 Wireless co.
60 "Let me think..."

SPRINGING INTO THINGS: AN ARTS PREVIEW

By ELLIE TRINKLE
Senior Arts & Culture Editor

As the February chill continues to drag on, it can be hard to see the light at the end of the tunnel (especially with Punxsutawney Phil reporting another six weeks of winter). Luckily, the Middlebury arts scene boasts nothing short of exciting. Offerings span from theatre to faculty lectures, and guarantee a warm sanctuary for even the coldest days of the season.

The Middlebury Performing Arts Series is continuing its 106th season with a program ranging from dance to multimedia to music. March 4 brings "Movement Matters: Body/Mind/Funk/Time" with Michael Sakamoto, where participants will learn Butoh and American street dance styles. Sakamoto will teach people the intercultural dance style and its significance within post-World War II Japan and the U.S.

A few days later, Sakamoto will join Paul D. Miller (DJ Spooky) for "time/life/beauty"; an interdisciplinary, multimedia performance that highlights anti-war and environmental themes. The show will feature dance, hip-hop and other multimedia elements to weave this intricate narrative together.

Then, world-class baroque chamber ensemble Le Consort will grace the stage with works by famous composers like Bach and Telemann. PAS' final performance of the season comes a few days later with award-winning Celtic quintet Goitse (a Gaelic word for "come here"). The quintet will help ring in the St. Patrick's Day festivities with their original compositions that honor traditional Irish music.

For a good solo activity, check out the Johnson Exhibition Gallery which changes its exhibit out every month or so. Currently on display is "Cultural Fabrics; The Kimono Through Literary, Cross-Cultural, and Practical Lenses" which explores the Kimono and how it engages with craft, Western aesthetics, Japanese literature and fashion traditions.

The exhibit also features work from the J-Term course "Building the Japanese Teahouse" taught by Douglas Brooks. The masterfully constructed teahouse displayed in the center of the gallery was built by Brooks and his 12 students. Guests in the exhibit are even encouraged to go inside the structure, permitting they take their shoes off before entering.

The Middlebury College Museum of Art also has plenty of new exhibits in the Spring. Currently on is "Beyond Boundaries: Rethinking African Art at Middlebury" which aims to dismantle Western art historical understandings of African art and create dialogue about the "complex zone of cross-cultural contact." Also on display is "David Teniers's Theatrum Pictorium" which highlights the masterful work by the Flemish artist that created the first illustrated catalogue of a significant painting collection.

For those seeking to learn even more about art, this spring features several interesting talks. March brings "Curated by ChatGPT: Notes on AI–Human Collaboration", which focuses on an experiment performed at Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University to use AI to curate an exhibition from the Museum's preexisting collection. The talk will provide critical analysis on the project and curators from the Nasher Museum Julia McHugh and Marshall Price will evaluate the effectiveness and role of AI in the curatorial world.

Other talks include a guest lecture visit from French Architect Aurélie Frolet in March, a talk detailing the pedagogical approach behind the "Building the Japanese Teahouse" J-Term course and an the journey of how Rutland resident John LaFountain's discovery of a seventeenth-century seal ended up in a Middlebury farm.

Or, attend a film at the Hirschfield International Film Series which screens once a month on Thursdays. This month brings the 2025 Ukrainian film "Timestamp" by Kateryna Gornostai. Three years since Russia's invasion on Ukraine, the film highlights students and teachers who seek to continue learning under constant threat. ""A remarkable portrait of the Ukrainian school system and their belief in a brighter future for the young," a review on The Moveable Feast writes about the film, which has been nominated at several film festivals around the world.

Courtesy Photos /Eddie Kavanagh & Tatti Ribeiro

Top: Goitse. Bottom: Clip from Tatti Ribeiro's film "VALENTINA."

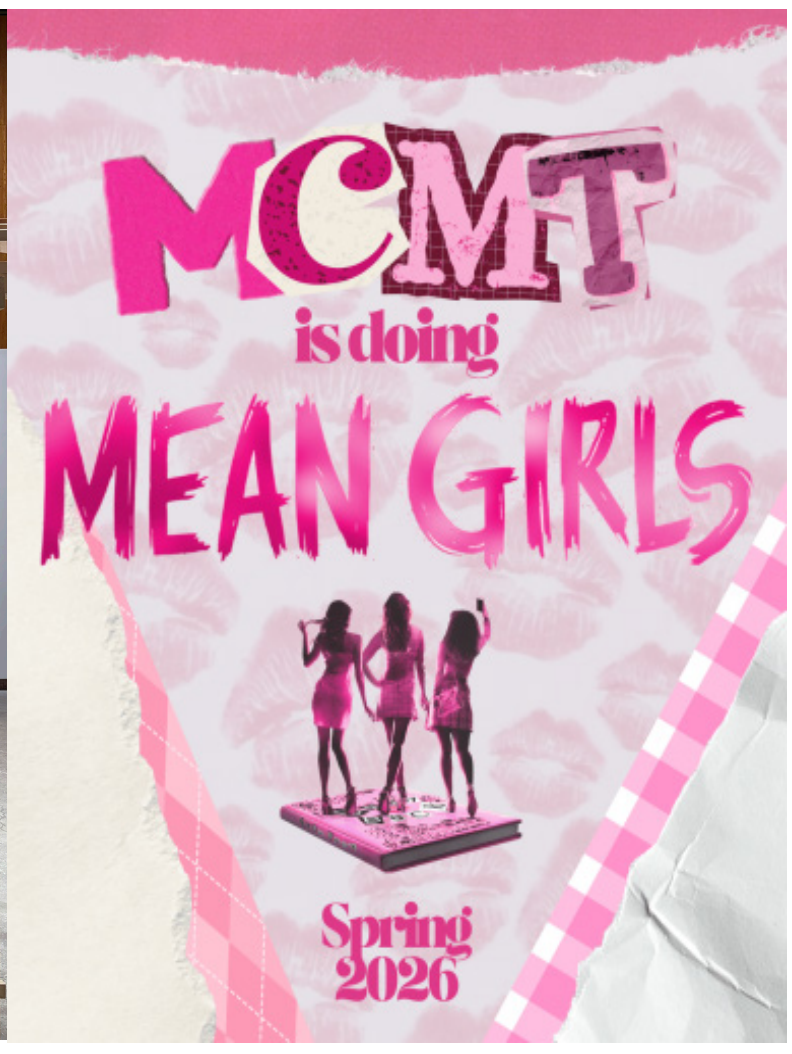
The film department is also sponsoring a screening of "VALENTINA" followed by a Q&A with director Tatti Ribeiro on March 3. "VALENTINA" is a hybrid film; merging narrative-comedy and documentary style together to tell the story of Valentina, who lives in a border town. As she passes from El Paso and Juárez, she navigates debt, familial issues and daily pressures.

April brings both showers and theatre productions. Starting April 9, "The Maids" by Jean Genet will grace Wright Memorial Stage. Directed by Professor of Theatre and Department Chair Claudio Mederios, this play tells the story of two maids, Claire and Solange, who begin a game of make- believe where they fantasize about murdering their mistress. Only, things take a turn when fantasy and reality collide and power dynamics begin to be questioned.

April 30—May 2 brings Thornton Wilder's "Our Town", directed by guest director Melissa Lourie. Set in a small town in New Hampshire, the play follows two families and their fellow townspeople as they navigate themes of loss, marriage and eternity. "Our Town" is about the small moments, and the connections that get us through even the toughest of times.

If you're looking for even more live performances to watch, Middlebury College Musical Theatre (MCMT) has got you covered. This spring, "Mean Girls" will grace the stage with its fast-paced, comedic energy that is sure to make you feel nostalgic. After the club's success last semester with "A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder," they are riding a high that Regina George and Cady Heron are sure to uphold.

This is just a small taste of all that the Middlebury spring arts calendar has to offer, but one thing's for sure, this semester's offerings have something for everyone. And after you've watched, listened or created this semester and feel urged to share your experience, remember we're only one email away...



Left: Johnson Gallery's Teahouse. Right: MCMT
Staff Photo/Ellie Trinkle & Courtesy Photo /MCMT

CONVERSATIONAL ART: MESHI CHAVEZ

By CHRISTY LIANG
Arts & Culture Editor

Conversational Art is a column of artist interviews (faculty & students alike) foregrounding the personal voice, the creative process and bouts of insight springing from the resonant space in-between.

I discovered Butoh dance this January, and it was sensational. I kept saying to friends how it was a "spiritual practice in motion," an improvised phrase in the moment which continues to ring true as the practice deepens.

Professor Chavez carries a captivating presence that resonates with care. I knew it was the right place to be the moment he asked us to walk, but not as us. Walk defviantly–backwards, tiptoeing, hopping like a rabbit, slower and then faster. Discover ways to be outside of our domesticated bodies. Discover opportunities for unison, resonance, and reconciliation through movement arising entirely from impulse.

I sat down with Professor Chavez for a conversation about his decades-long chase after Butoh, his inspiring relationships with world-class Butoh dancers, as well as his profound insights inton art, life, and finding our place in the universe.

Chavez first found Butoh in a photo book underneath a massive sound system in a house he shared with fellow artists in Portland, Oregon. He was transfixed by the strangeness of the figures; something about the theatricality of the contorted bodies spoke to him.

Around the time of his chance encounter with Butoh in pictorial form, a festival called TBA (Time Based Art) happened in Portland which had a Butoh workshop. Chavez immediately knew he had to go, despite knowing nothing about it.

At the festival, Chavezhe first met and became immediately entranced by Akira Kasai, a world-renowned pioneer of Butoh: .

"... the workshop itself blew my mind. It opened me up, and then I saw Akira Kasai's piece, which was called Pollen Revolution. I went three nights in a row. I could not understand what I was seeing.

It was all goosebumps. And at the end of that last night, I thought, I still don't know what's going on, but I know I have to learn how to do that. I saw how Akira Kasai was commanding space by moving beyond himself enough that it was moving the people who were watching him. It was like we were all ensnared in a field. And so I started chasing him first."

Later on, Chavez met Denise Fujiwara – another leading figure in the art form – at the Exit Festival, part of a Butoh consortium held at an old farmhouse turned compound outside of Berlin, where eight Bbutoh choreographers and about a hundred dancers worldwide were brought together.

"The very first night they had all of the teachers perform. When Denise performed, I was on the edge of my seat. That thing, again, was appearing where I was like, 'How are you doing that?' I'm seeing something that is unnameable. Right there and then, I knew she was the one. I knew I was going to work with her. I just knew it. We were having lunch one day and she was talking about working with Natsu Nakajiima, and how she wanted to have Natsu create a solo for her, and Natsu said no. Ten years later, she went back and was like, 'I need you to create a performance for me.' In our conversation, she said to me, 'I knew that if Natsu said no again, I was gonna give up dancing forever.' And I was like, 'Whoa, Denise, that's a big statement.' But she was deadpan. She said: 'If I knew I couldn't get what Natsu had, then I didn't want to dance anymore, because there's enough mediocre dance in the world.'

I almost started crying. It still makes me cry. That's the moment I knew she was my teacher."

I asked Professor Chavez about the tension between being an artist and a scholar, between living the truths and imparting them.

"If I'm being perfectly honest, I'm always struggling with this institution. Not this one, per se. I'm not entirely convinced. I try not to compare myself to other professors. But sometimes I look around and think, I'm not bought into this the way I see other people. I didn't see being a professor on my bingo card. I didn't go to college. I'm a high school dropout. I chased a dream around the world for this thing that is so small and so unknown and somehow it's opened these amazing doors for me. When I got hired as the artist-in-residence during the pandemic, I didn't think I would ever create work ever again. All of my energy just went into surviving. For my first piece, I had to force myself. It was in J term, and I told everyone that I was having an open rehearsal at 7 in the morning, and anyone could come. I knew no one would come because who was going to show up at 7 in the morning. I would go into the dance studio, put my hoodie over my head, roll around the ground, and I would cry. Then halfway through that J term, I was like, 'Oh, I think there's a piece here.'

COURTESY PHOTO/MESHI CHAVEZ

Visiting Assitant Professor of Dance Meshi Chavez.

And so I made a piece from my tears. The truth is, everything that I'm teaching you in class, I have to live. Deeply. Or my life doesn't work."

Towards the end of our conversation, I shared with Professor Chavez how learning Butoh led me to appreciate the inherent intelligence to the ways in which circumstances emerge outside of our control. The natural, unperturbed rhythm of things.

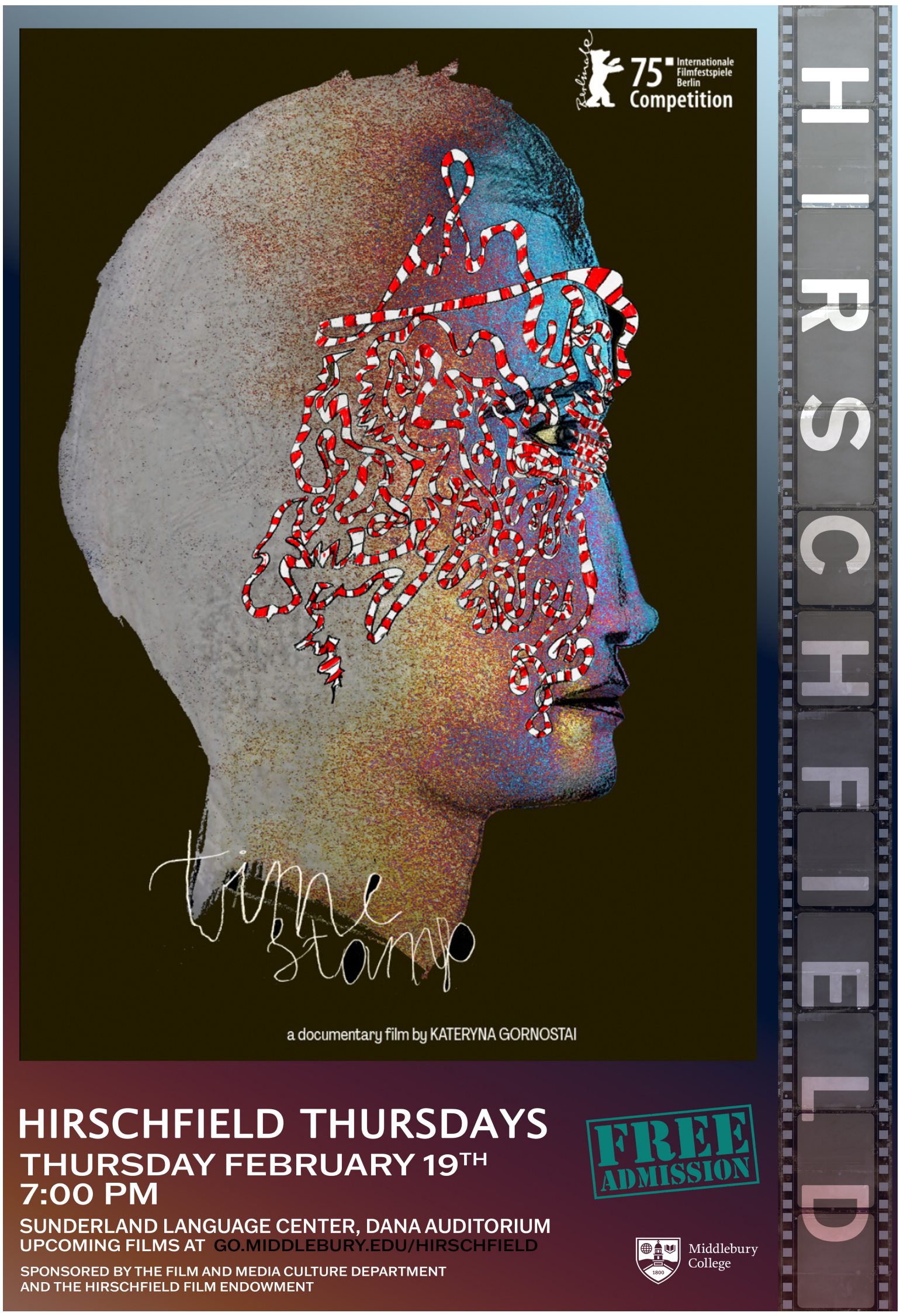
He responded by sharing his decades-long connection with a theologian.

"We met through Native ceremonies. One of his inspirations in his life is Meister Eckhart, who, I think, lived from 1260-1338. He ended up being shut down by the church because his teachings were so radical. Eckhart would say that everything has its own isness, and that it's in the recognition of isness that relation is built. And that everything has its own resonance. That just blew people's minds at that time. It still blows people's minds.

Because if we really believed that, then it would have to change how we interact with everything.

"All of a sudden, we're not the ones enacting the thing; all of the things are enacting the thing, and we're in some sort of communication with them. I think that points back to indigeneity. I always tell people that if I was in a tribe 150 years ago, everything I needed would be right around me. And if it wasn't, it would be 50 miles that way. It's all in our sphere already.

But we're not taught that. We're taught that the other thing is way over there, and that it's going to have to be always just beyond your reach. What if it's within our reach? Maybe things are beyond. But maybe they're right there. I don't know. I think about these things a lot."



MEN'S BASKETBALL SENIORS BID FAREWELL TO PROGRAM

By DANTE AGUILAR
Contributing Writer

On Feb. 13, Middlebury men's basketball faced Hamilton for their senior night game. For the first time ever, the five graduating seniors took the court together as starters for their final game as Panthers. Over the loudspeakers, the lineup was announced as: Evan Flaks '26, Edward Witherington '26, Mark Newell '26, Jackson McKersie '26, and Oliver Urena '26.

Newell was a crowd favorite, and his performance did not disappoint. Within the first minutes of the game, Newell registered two dunks, a block, and a steal. Every time he touched the ball the gym roared.

In only his sixth career start, Urena brought a similar spark to the game. He bolted past defenders, forcing them to foul him as he charged toward the rim. That strategy only worked partially, as he consistently knocked down free throws to pull the momentum in Middlebury's favor.

Early in the second half, Witherington added to the senior highlight reel. Sawyer Ramey '28 drove down the lane, pulled two defenders and flipped a behind-the-back feed to Witherington, who rose up and slammed it home over a Hamilton defender. The gym erupted.

Despite many dazzling plays, Middlebury could not take a hold of the lead.

With every time out remaining, head coach Goldsmith reminded the team to go back to the basics: play physical and together. Keeping that in mind, the plan in motion was to get three stops in a row. Middlebury tried to execute the plan, but ultimately fell short.

The night before, it was a similar story against Amherst. Middlebury played one of their best offensive halves all season, and on defense, Middlebury applied great pressure, forced turnovers and recorded stops. However, Amherst's shooting consistency,and one player in particular — Nate Pabis — proved unstoppable for Middlebury.

"He's stronger than he looks", Newell said about Pabis during halftime. "He's moving me in the paint, and even when I stay in front of him, he's got the footwork to get around me. I'm just going to have to do my work early to force him out of the paint."

Pabis led the Amherst Mammoths with 19 points, doing most of the damage in the paint. Amherst entered the game with one of the lowest scoring offenses in the country, typically relying on three-point shooting and defense. The Panthers focused on taking away the perimeter and forcing twos, but Pabis found his rhythm, propelling Amherst to the win

After the final buzzer against Hamilton Continentals, the Middlebury Panthers headed to the locker room one last time to debrief with the coaching staff. Coming off back-to-back losses— and with the seniors having just played their final game in a Middlebury jersey— the room was heavy with emotion. The coaches promptly stepped in, easing the tension as they addressed the team.

Goldsmith spoke first, expressing gratitude to the entire program, and especially the seniors, for embracing the coaching transition.

"[The seniors] never gave the staff any problems. When the year is not going out as planned, things can go south in a hurry, and it never did," Goldsmith said. "I will forever be grateful to you guys for showing up the way that you did."

The seniors got a chance to give their closing remarks at a post-game dinner. One by one, they all expressed their gratitude to the program and to their families. Mckersie's speech particularly stood out from the rest.

McKerise diligently battled injuries throughout his basketball career as a Panther, losing a season and a half due to injury. This senior year was the first time he was able to play a full season.

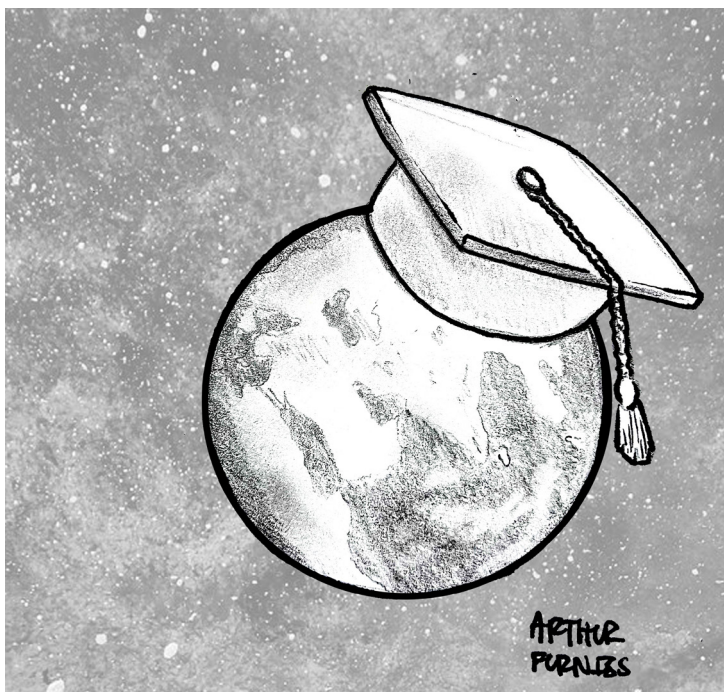
McKersie then addressed the freshman class. With five seniors graduating, the six newcomers now face the opportunity to step into the vacant roles and help shape the future for the men's basketball team.

"To the younger guys, I know it's really easy to feel grateful to be a part of this program right now. But find a way to feel that in six months. Find a way to feel that next season, because you never know what's going to happen,"McKersie said in reference to his history with injury. "The more you appreciate the process–– when it sucks, and especially when it's nice–– the happier you will be with this game."

Middlebury officially finished the season 8-16. Yet, McKersie and the rest of the graduating class believe that the program is in good hands.

"I feel so good about the younger guys. They care, they put in so much work, and I think the habits are just going to build. It's going to be something really special in a couple of years, and I'm excited to sit on my couch and watch it," McKersie said.

Editor's Note: Dante Aguilar '26 is team manager for the men's basketball team.



Above: Senior class together in Pepin. From left to right, Jackson McKersie '26, Mark Newell '26, Evan Flaks '26, Edward Witherington '26, Oliver Urena '26 and Russell L. Reilley Head Coach of Men's Basketball Matt Goldsmith

COURTESY PHOTOS / WILL COSTELLO

A LIFE IN FULL GEAR

By THEO MANIATIS
Sports Editor

Bob Spaulding is the bus driver for the men's soccer and hockey teams, and among the most hard-working people out there.

"You look out the window at 7 a.m., and he's cleaning the bus, wiping down the windows," said men's soccer head coach Alex Elias said. "We can barely keep our locker room clean."

Spaulding grumbled about his dirty bus a few times during the interview. "That's why I hate this time of year, because that bus was clean when I left the garage," he said. "Now it looks like I've been out four-wheeling with it." I told him it looked clean to me, but he wasn't convinced.

Spaulding boasts a big smile and a contagious energy. He also loves talking with people, a trait he inherited from his dad -and a vital skill when you're driving others in a 40-foot bus almost everydaymost days.

"I just love people. I love taking the people to where they want to go. I love peoples' stories," he explained.

Spaulding was born and raised in Fairhaven, Vermont. In 1983, the summer after graduating high school, he met his future wife at age 17. T – they will celebrate their 40th anniversary this year. "She's a golden girl to have kept me this long," admitted Spaulding, smiling widely. They have three kids, one of whom recently moved next door.

Four years ago, he started driving the men's soccer team, and this year, the men's hockey team. By now he's attuned to the teams' habits, such as where they like to eat: the soccer team at a Chipotle and the hockey players at Noel's in Rutland.

The native Vermont nativeer says his flexibility and knack for remembering details is why Middlebury teams keep requesting him. Nevertheless, Spaulding still insists on one rule: "A fed bus driver is a happy bus driver." WEver since, whenever the soccer team stops at a grocery store, Elias treats his driver to whatever he wants.

While free food is a sweet deal, Spaulding— --true to his curious nature— --appreciates the connections with the players even more. "A lot of the guys after two or three trips ——- and I didn't ask for this ——- but they call me by my name. I'm not used to that," he said. "A lot of them want to hear your story, where you come from, and what you got for family, you know?"

The players appreciate Spaulding, too. "He's always telling us good luck, he comes to our games, we give him gear. We appreciate Bob, he's a member of our team," said soccer midfielder Dylan Payne '28.5 said.

"He's a legend," added defender Charlie Johnson '28 added.

However, Spaulding didn't begin his career driving buses. During college, he would come home on weekends and head to the bar. His father, Jim, frustrated that his son was such a big partier, found him a job taking trash to the dump for Aubuchon Hardware. It wasn't long before the pizza shop nearby needed someone too, and soon enough Spaulding found enough customers for his own trash business.

A few years later, he started working for Premier Coach buses. He hauled trash from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. before driving the bus from 4 p.m. to 11 p.m,. sSeven days a week. He sold the trash business, but still drives buses on the weekends and oil tankers during the week. Despite the long work hours, Spaulding carves out time to volunteer for the town select board and travel in his camper to watch dirt races around the country.

For Spaulding, it's a priority to help others in his time off. Every year, he, and his daughter volunteer for a week with the Peace Corps in Honduras. He builds houses with the construction team, while she doles out supplies for the medical team.

"When I think I have a bad day up here, it's I'm living on top of the earth compared to those guys," Spaulding said, explaining how people were living in fish shinnies, with dirt floors and tin roofs. "They don't have any clean water or nothing."

The trip has been a tradition since his daughter's high school days. Since then, he's remained particularly close to one family, helping them build tile floors and a bathroom out back. In return for all his hard work, they've nicknamed Spaulding "El Toro," or the bull. Whenever he goes down there nownowadays, he stuffs his pockets full of money for the family.

COURTESY PHOTO / BOB SPAULDING
Spaulding poses for a photo while volunteering in Honduras.

For the past 40 years, Spaulding has worked seven days a week but still chooses to volunteer with a significant chunk of his free time. He recognizes the importance of lending a hand to those in need. "It's my drug to help others," Spaulding said.

Now 60 years old, Spaulding has worked at a breakneck pace for a long time. When asked how much longer he'll drive buses, his answer was almost predictable: "As long as I can physically do it."

PREM PRAKASH: POWERLIFTING WORLD RECORDS

By Simon Schmieder
Senior Sports Editor

"The only people who belong in boxes?"

Prem Prakash, the yoga and mindfulness coach for Middlebury's varsity sports teams, has another identity. Better known for putting athletes to sleep during Shavasana, Prem is also a quadruple world-record-breaking powerlifter.

Last November at the International Powerlifting League's Tested World Championships in Wolverhampton, England, Prem squatted 292.1 pounds, benchpressed 187.4 pounds and deadlifted 364.8 pounds — all world records within the 148-pound weight class of the 65–69 age bracket. Because powerlifting performance is measured by the sum of one's three lifts, Prem naturally broke the world record for a competition total in his age and weight class as well.

Prem's journey to setting four world records can be traced back to Covid-19, the assembly of a home gym and father-son bonding. Prem acquired a power rack and weights so his son, who was training as an MMA fighter, could continue lifting at home during the pandemic. Having wrestled growing up, Prem was no stranger to lifting heavy objects, but four decades of practicing yoga had passed. It didn't take long for Prem to find his old form.

"In a relatively short period of time I started realizing I was putting up some good numbers for a guy my weight," Prem said. "I looked online and thought, 'oh, I think I can be competitive.'"

Seizing the opportunity, Prem registered for a string of local meets. He performed well and ultimately qualified for the 2022 North American championships, where he won a gold medal. He returned the next year and increased his total by over 80 pounds. By November 2024, Prem competed in his first World Championship. Three years of steady gains, 60 state records and a couple of national records preceded Prem's climb to the world stage at the World Championships in Wolverhampton last November.

The World Championships included the standard powerlifting procedure. Competitors have three chances to complete each of the three lift types. Lifting straps, which wrap around the wrist and bar, are forbidden, making a successful attempt as much a feat of grip strength as raw power. Powerlifters can never reduce the weight between attempts in a competition, and if one fails on all three attempts, they are disqualified.

There's no Goldilocks-ing your way to a weight that is "just right" — the first lift must be both light enough to guarantee completion and heavy enough to prime the body for more demanding subsequent attempts. The next lift is a strategic jump, and when well-calculated, the final attempt is an all-out push. Prem, however, had an additional attempt at the deadlift in last November's meet.

When chasing a world record, competitors are permitted a fourth lift. With the deadlift record in reach in Wolverhampton, Prem approached the platform for a final time and internalized the crowd's heightened support for such an "unusual" lifter as himself. Acknowledging the spotters, Prem shifted his focus to his sole task at the moment and gave the lift everything he could. Raising nearly 365 pounds off the ground, Prem broke the previous record by one pound. His narrow success embodies a lesson many athletes have heard during his yoga sessions: adjusting your mind to become one percent better.

Prem teaches a distinct optimism about our limits. All humans have the ability to improve themselves by one percent in any field — athletic, academic or professional. Making these slim improvements is contingent on fine-tuning the mind, the point at which Prem's unique powerlifting advantage begins.

"I know how to work with my mind directly," Prem said. Decades of practicing yoga have allowed him to develop deeper control over his mind, an invaluable skill in powerlifting. For instance, elite powerlifters will often bear double their body weight on their back for the squat. Once one begins to descend, it's inherent to feel a pang of fear— a reflex to bail on the lift and avoid getting crushed.

"The ability to override those impulses is part of the mysticism of a sport like powerlifting," Prem continued. "I say it's a little bit meathead and a little bit mystic."

Mastering the mysticism of powerlifting— the development of an intimate trust between mind and body— is what singles out a record-breaker. Powerlifters must accustom themselves to extreme exertion while suppressing momentary impulses of self-preservation. At a level where all competitors are strong, "the difference is the mental aspect."

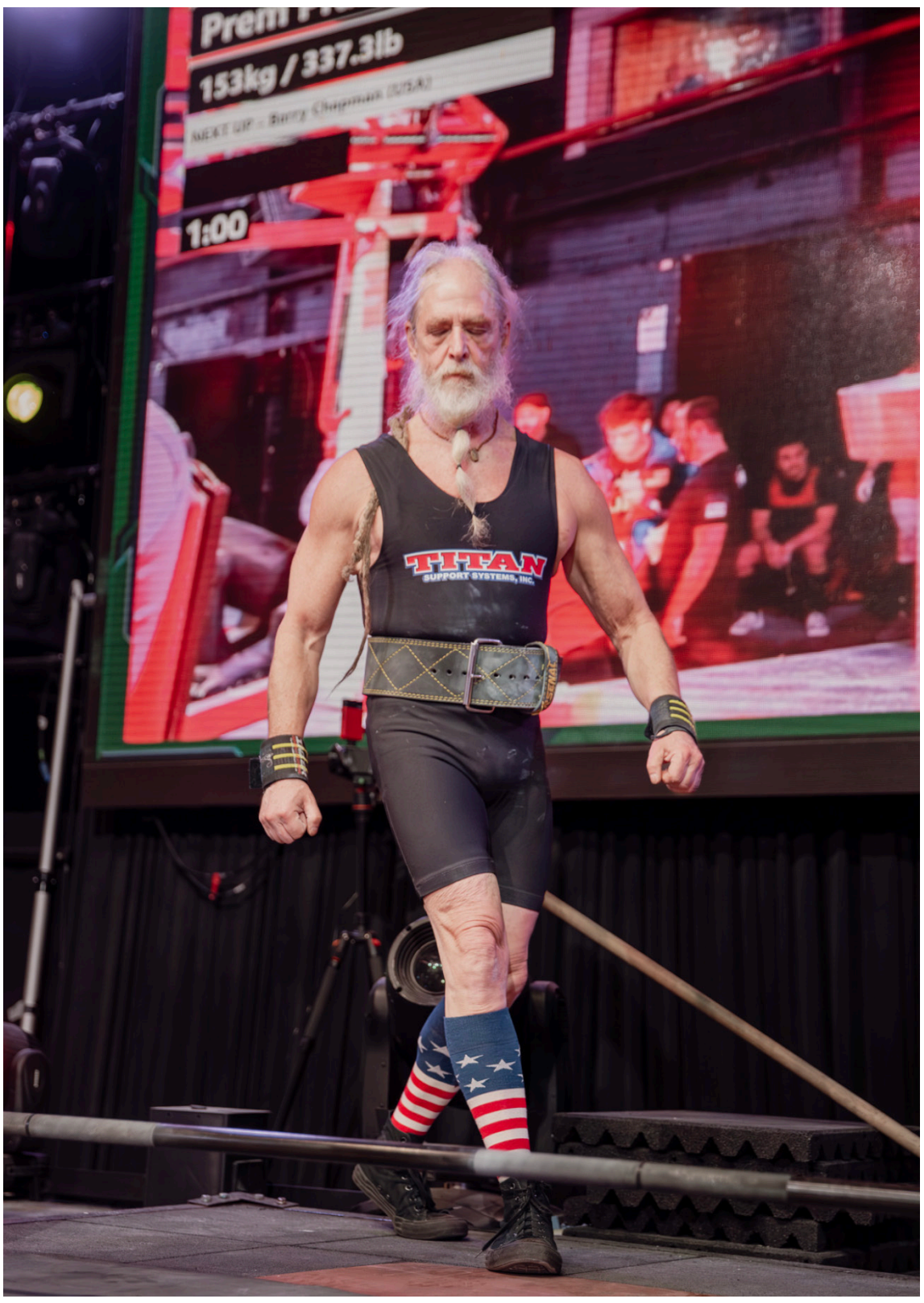
The mental aspect also involves accepting failure, another theme Prem embraces in powerlifting. To overcome the fear of the sport's dangers and perform well, one must become comfortable with occasional failure. As Prem teaches his athletes, "it's legit to try and not succeed. It's part of being human." The price for failure in powerlifting can be great, but until that moment comes, unfulfilled potential and undefined limits remain.

"Sometimes you get caught, sometimes you fly, sometimes you crash, but it's a full life."

Prem is confident he has room to grow, and new opportunities such as the prestigious Olympia Pro meet await. For now, powerlifting remains indispensable in Prem's creation of a full life. His combination of powerlifting and yoga is a wonderful paradox: a way for him to exercise his competitive drive and explore his limits, an outlet to train hard, learn, and simply have fun.

"An individual should be so multifaceted, multidimensional, messy, and paradoxical that they can't fit into a box. That's a full human being."

So, who are the only people who belong in boxes according to Prem? "Dead people."



COURTESY PHOTO / PREM PRAKASH
Prem approaches the deadlift at the 2025 World Championships.